

# P A S H U P A T I

CULTURAL PORTRAIT HANDBOOK 6

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## Pashupati

### Authors

Melissa Jenkins  
Elke Selter  
Vibhushan Subba

### Text Editors

Melissa Jenkins  
Elke Selter

### Photography

Elke Selter  
Melissa Jenkins

### Layout Designer

Manohar Rai

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For more information please contact:  
UNESCO Kathmandu  
P.O. Box 14391, Jawalakhel, Lalitpur  
Kathmandu, Nepal

Email: [kathmandu@unesco.org](mailto:kathmandu@unesco.org)

Tel: +977-1-5554-396/769  
Fax: +977-1-5554-450

[www.unesco.org/kathmandu](http://www.unesco.org/kathmandu)

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HANUMAN DHOKA DURBAR SQUARE



PATAN DURBAR SQUARE



BHAKTAPUR DURBAR SQUARE



BAUDDHANATH



SWAYAMBHU



PASHUPATI



CHANGU NARAYAN

## CULTURAL PORTRAIT HANDBOOKS

Heritage and culture can be discovered and enjoyed throughout the Kathmandu Valley. Seven monument zones in particular were recognised to be of outstanding universal value by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) and have therefore been added to the List of World Heritage Sites (WHL).

The WHL includes cultural and natural heritage sites from all over the world, and the World Heritage Convention provides a legal tool for their protection. Of the 812 World Heritage Sites, four are located in Nepal, namely the Kathmandu Valley, Sagarmatha National Park, Royal Chitwan National Park and Lumbini, the birthplace of Lord Buddha.

The diverse monument zones of the Kathmandu Valley embody the uniquely intricate and yet refined Newari urban buildings and an incredible mix of Hindu and Buddhist culture. The Valley provides an example of mixed architectural styles and exquisite craftsmanship. Its very composition makes it one of the most complex World Heritage Sites on the WHL: not only does

it include the historic centers of The Valley's three main cities; it also encompasses remarkable living Hindu and Buddhist monuments.

The site was listed as a World Heritage Site in 1979 as bearing a unique testimony to a cultural tradition which is living (criteria iii) and is an outstanding example of a group of buildings that illustrate a significant stage in human history (criteria iv). The Valley is also the context for many living traditions and events, with artistic works of outstanding universal value (criteria vi).

This booklet is one of seven that were prepared as part of a wider awareness raising campaign aimed at focusing both local and international attention on the need to preserve the Kathmandu Valley WHS. Generous funding from the National Federation of UNESCO Associations in Japan (NFUAJ) has enabled the UNESCO Office in Kathmandu to prepare these publications highlighting the gems of the Valley and their rich mythological and historical background.





The Pashupati Temple, dedicated to the Hindu God Shiva, is situated 4km East of Kathmandu. The shrine of Pashupati is one of the holiest Hindu shrines in Nepal. Set on the banks of the Bagmati River, this is the place where many Nepali desire to spend their last hours, for their souls to be released. Afterwards, the mortal remains are cremated just a little further downstream.

The Pashupati Temple is a tirtha (pilgrimage place) and, like most Hindu tirthas, is located near a sacred river. The Bagmati is considered sacrosanct as it eventually merges with the Ganges. For Hindus all over the world, Pashupati is equal to Benares in India as a supreme pilgrimage site.

The temple is dedicated to Shiva, who represents one of the most important aspects of the Hindu Trinity of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva or the Creator, Preserver and Destroyer respectively. In his manifestation as Pashupati, Shiva is the lord of all beasts, gods, mortals, and titans and is the paramount deity for the people of Nepal.



## PASHUPATI, LORD OF ALL ANIMALS

According to the legend, Shiva lived in the Mrigasthali forest on the east bank of the Bagmati River. After spending days in the lovely groves and dreaming on the banks of the Bagmati River, Shiva felt that he was developing a real fondness for the place and decided not to return to Benares and Mount Kailash, as he has promised the other Gods.

He spent his days secretly enjoying his consort Parvati's company and indulging all his desires in the form of a deer, with a body of golden sheen, three eyes, one single golden horn, long ears, perfect teeth and a bright gaze. Parvati became a charming doe and together they dallied undisturbed through the forest.

When, after a while, none of the Gods had seen Shiva, Indra became worried. With Vishnu and a number of other Gods, he went to see Brahma to ask him for help. Together, all the Gods went searching for Shiva.

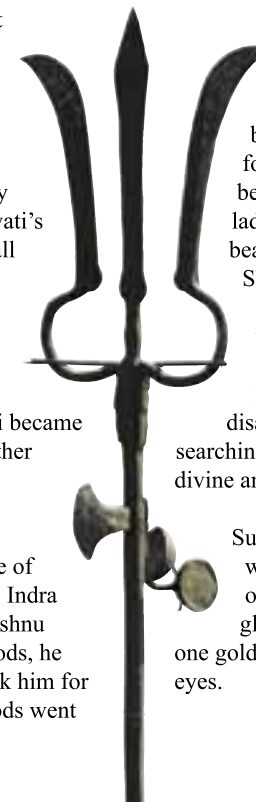
When they started searching the valleys of the great Himalayan mountains, the gods spotted Nandi, Shiva's mount. Knowing that Nandi was Shiva's most loyal follower, they were overjoyed at the sight of the bull.

Indeed, Nandi was able to direct the celestial search-team towards the forests on the Bagmati banks. Arriving at the sacred forest, the Gods spotted a very beautiful young woman. A young lady on her own, of such radiant beauty, could only be Parvati.

Shiva's consort informed the Gods of Shiva's hide-out, where he was spending his days in the form of a deer.

Following these words, Parvati disappeared and the Gods started searching the Mrigasthali forest for the divine animal.

Suddenly, they spotted a deer which stood out from all the others. Its body had a golden glow and perfect shape. It had one golden horn and beautiful shiny eyes.





Shiva & Nandi



Having recognized Shiva, the Gods began by offering prayers to him. They rushed down the hill and surrounded the deer in all directions. Vishnu, Indra and Brahma jumped out of the crowd of Gods and caught the deer by its golden horn. Indra grabbed the tip of the horn, Brahma the middle and Vishnu held the base. As soon as they took the horn, it broke into three pieces, leaving each God holding a single piece. The fabulous deer jumped high into the sky until it disappeared.

The Gods stared at the skies and started offering prayers to Shiva. Pleased and honoured by all the devotion, Shiva appeared in the sky and addressed the Gods. He announced that the pieces of his golden horn would become his lingams, which could be venerated. He also announced that people would come and live around the sacred Mrigasthali forest, that there would always be sufficient rain and plenty of fertile ground. After his announcements, Shiva lit up the skies and disappeared again. Immediately afterwards, a bright and shining lingam with five faces appeared on the Bagmati bank.

The Gods once again prayed to Shiva and pleaded for him to return to Benares or Mount Kailash. Shiva replied that it was his wish to remain in the forest and that from then on he wanted to be venerated as **‘Pashupati: the Supreme Lord of all Animals’**.

He added that the Bagmati river would bring virtue to all and that those who bathed or drank from its sacred waters, would never be reborn as animals. It is still believed that bathing in the

Bagmati river and transversing the Mrigasthali forest relieves a man of all his sins.

Parvati requested Shiva to allow her to stay close to him. He granted her wish and her shrine, the Vatsala Shrine can be found between the eastern staircase and the Arya Ghat (see page 27) on the banks of the river.

The Gods, who liked the area very much and wanted to be close to Shiva and the luminous lingam, established a town made of gold and precious stones around the lingam and called it Pashupati.

Over time, the city turned into a regular town made of brick, stone and wood and the lingam disappeared into the ground. The gods left the area and went back to the heavens.

Many years later, Nim Gopal, a cowherd, used to graze his cow in the Pashupati pastures. Every day the cow would stop at a particular mound and start spilling milk over it. The cowherd was very curious and wanted to discover the reason for this peculiar behavior. He went to the mound and started

digging. As he dug, a dazzling phallus emerged from the earth. The lingam was so powerful and its beams were so radiant that it burnt the cowherd to dust. The news reached far and wide. A very knowledgeable and famous sage heard about the unfortunate demise of Nim Gopal and immediately installed the cowherd’s son on the throne of Nepal.

It is said that the first Shiva Lingam of Pashupati was the very one that Nim Gopal excavated from the ground.



Brahma Vishnu Shiva



Pashupati Temple complex





# SHIVA TEMPLE COMPLEX

The Pashupati Temple was constructed under the Somadeva dynasty in the 3rd Century BC. The gilt roof was first added to the temple in 1297 AD. In 1360 the lingam was replaced and the temple was further renovated by King Bhupalendra Malla in 1754.

Today, the temple is part of a much larger complex. The largest part is only accessible for Hindus, leaving most tourists with tantalizing glimpses from the gates.

Upon entering from the southern gateway, one comes across the numerous votive lingams at the **Chausathi** (64 in Nepali) **Mahadev** (meaning statue) **courtyard**. As its name says, the courtyard is full of small Shiva lingams: 64 in total. People who enter the courtyard touch and pay respects to each lingam. In the centre of the courtyard stands a circular temple known as **Kotilingeshvar**. It was built by King Pratap Malla in 1654. The Chausathi leads to the main temple courtyard.





Detail entrance Shiva Temple



The Pashupati Temple stands in the middle of an open courtyard. There are many entrances: the famous western gate, the eastern stairway from the Arya Ghat and the southern gateway. The southern gateway is guarded by security personnel who frisk Hindu visitors and check their belongings. There is a structure nearby where people are obliged to store their shoes and other belongings before setting foot on the sacred ground.

Immediately upon entering the temple from the Chausathi side, one comes across a large yagya hall in which yagya or vedic ritual sacrifices are performed. Numerous small statuettes line its entrance. Inside this hall are many shrines such as the **Kirtimukh Bhairav** and the beautifully decorated **Nava Durga Shrine**. When there are yagyas to be performed, the area becomes crowded with priests.

A shrine to **Satyanarayan** is built upon a large platform in front of the hall and the temple courtyard is always busy with pilgrims from all over Nepal. Today, women, children, sadhus and pilgrims from all walks of

life have gathered around the temple. Somewhere near the western gate a group of musicians have gathered and are playing their instruments to good effect. People gather around the performers and nod their heads in appreciation. A long queue is snaking its way around the temple as people wait eagerly for their turn to glimpse the Shiva lingam. The four doors of the main temple are only opened once a day and most of the time people crowd around the western door. A few monkeys have climbed the roof of the temple and are watching the movements of the people with much interest.

The **Pashupati Temple**, which stands in the middle of the courtyard, has a square plan, is two-tiered and built upon a plinth. It measures 23.6 meters tall. The four doors of the temple are silver and gilt-plated and heavily decorated with painted images of deities. Both the copper roofs are supported by numerous struts adorned with beautifully carved images of various Hindu Gods. In between the struts expertly crafted panels of latticed wood work are displayed. The main

#### Priests of Pashupati

The Bhattas, or priests of the Pashupati Temple, are Brahmins from South India. This tradition is said to have originated under the guidance of the renowned tantric sage Shantikar Acharya, in the 6th Century AD. The chief priest is known as Mool Bhatt or Raval and is answerable only to the King of Nepal. Only four priests of the highest order are sanctioned to touch the idol housed at the heart of Pashupati Temple.

The unusual system of employing Indian priests is necessary because whenever a Nepali King passes away the whole population of Nepal is expected to halt religious activity and undertake at 12 month period of mourning. As Pashupati requires constant worship the Indian holy men are free to officiate over the funerary rites during the period of official royal mourning.



Detail entrance Shiva Temple



image, which lies in the centre of the cella, is known as the mukhalingam, and is about 1 meter high (see page 23).

There is a circumambulatory path around the Pashupati Temple. Small

flights of steps are built into the plinth on all sides and lead to the four doors of the temple. These are guarded by magnificent metal lions. A huge trident is presented in front of the northern door. The trident symbolises the trinity of **Shiva, Vishnu and Brahma** and their respective aspects (Destruction, Preservation and Creation). Facing the western door are two **Nandi Bulls**.

The bigger Nandi, which stands behind a smaller one, is visible from the main entrance and was originally constructed in stone. It was later covered in gilt copper by the Bhaktapurian princess Vikramadevi. Near the Nandi bull is an image of **Hanuman** the monkey-god, draped in red cloth and stained with vermillion. Towards the left of the Nandi facing the western door are small shrines dedicated to different forms of Shiva. There is also a replica of the main mukhalingam. Since people are not allowed to touch the original lingam, they press their heads against the replica. There are many smaller shrines surrounding the temple like those of **Annapurna, Ganesh, and Suryanarayan**.

Towards the northeast corner of the courtyard is the **Temple of Vasuki**, one of the naga (snake) kings. This temple was built by King Pratap Malla (mid 17th century) but the image of Vasuki

### Nandi

The Nandi Bull is the vehicle or mount of Shiva. He is considered the guardian of all quadrupeds and often provides music for the dance of Shiva, which is popularly known as Tandava. The Nandi's white colour symbolizes justice and over time devotees have come to worship the Nandi as a lesser god in his own right. Nandi Bulls are generally located next to or in front of all major Shaivite shrines, and as Shiva's foremost disciple it is important to seek his blessings before entering.

Nandi Bull in front of Shiva Temple







was donated later by King Birendra (1945-2001).

Vasuki came to Pashupati to protect it from evil and the temple dedicated to the snake king is visited before entering the main Shiva Temple. Every afternoon the priest sprinkles holy water from inside the temple and the people break into spontaneous cries of Hara Hara Mahadev, gracefully bowing their heads to receive droplets of the holy liquid. There is a small mark etched upon the ground in front of the temple, which resembles a snake. People believe that this is the body of Vasuki and genuflect, touching the mark with their foreheads.

Immediately beyond the Vasuki temple is another small courtyard, which houses the **Shrine of Badrinath**. This courtyard is less crowded and there are small structures where people sit, talk, rest and avoid the heat of the sun. A small ekhamukha lingam (single faced lingam) is also found in this courtyard. On the eastern side of the main courtyard, near the stairs that lead to the Arya Ghat (see page 27), a group of people have gathered around

the **Mukti Mandapa**. The Mukti Mandapa is similar in form to the standard resthouses or mandapa, with a small enclosure which houses a Shiva lingam on one side and a platform where people gather to sing bhajans to one another.

Today the lead singer is a middle-aged man, playing the harmonium, his eyes closed in concentrated devotion. He takes a deep breath and belts out one bhajan after another in a low guttural voice. The group slowly swells as people are drawn to the melody. Men and women are sitting on the platform, their legs crossed, palms clasped and fingers laced together with beatific looks on their faces.

At the head of the congregation, sitting on a stool a little higher than the others is a pujari (priest). He strokes his long flowing beard and in a mellow voice instructs the gathering. He starts with a hymn to Shiva, "O Lord of the universe..., wielder of the trident, the Immovable One...protect me from the miseries of this world." He then delves into the depths of the **Bhagvadgita** and other religious texts, gradually

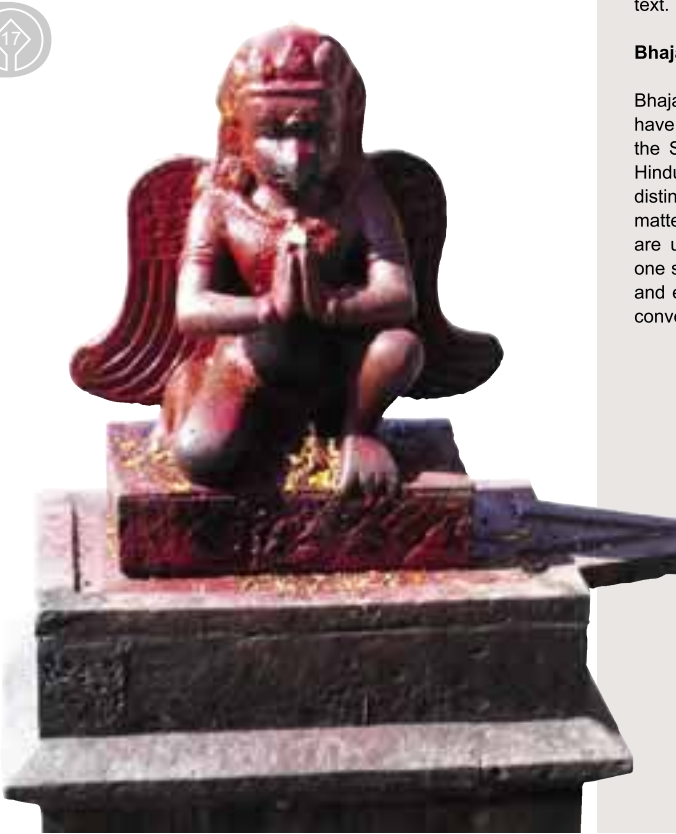
#### Churning the Sea of Milk

The snake-king Vasuki is venerated because of his role in the legendary event of the churning of the Sea of Milk. In ancient times the Gods and the demons made a pact to join forces to churn the milk ocean in order to extract amrita, the elixir of life. The mountain Mandara was used as the churning stick and the snake-king was the rope. When the churning began Vasuki inadvertently vomited poison. Shiva saw the poison pouring from Vasuki's mouth and rushed forward to swallow it in order to prevent the ocean from being contaminated. In the nick of time, Parvati caught hold of Shiva's neck and stopped the poison from entering the rest of his body. The poison lodged in his neck and turned it blue.



digressing into the discourses, the importance of yoga and other spiritual matters.

The people resting on the railing overlooking the Arya Ghat, who were simultaneously listening to the afternoon sermons and paying keen attention to the funerary rites below, are slowly moving towards the main temple. The pungent smoke from the funeral pyre has driven them away. From the east bank of the river, tourists aim their cameras with huge zoom lenses at the pyre and the temple courtyard. A stairway near the Mukti Mandapa leads down to the Arya Ghat. At the top of this stairway is a replica of **Buddhanilkantha** and shrines and images of Narayan and Lal Ganesh.



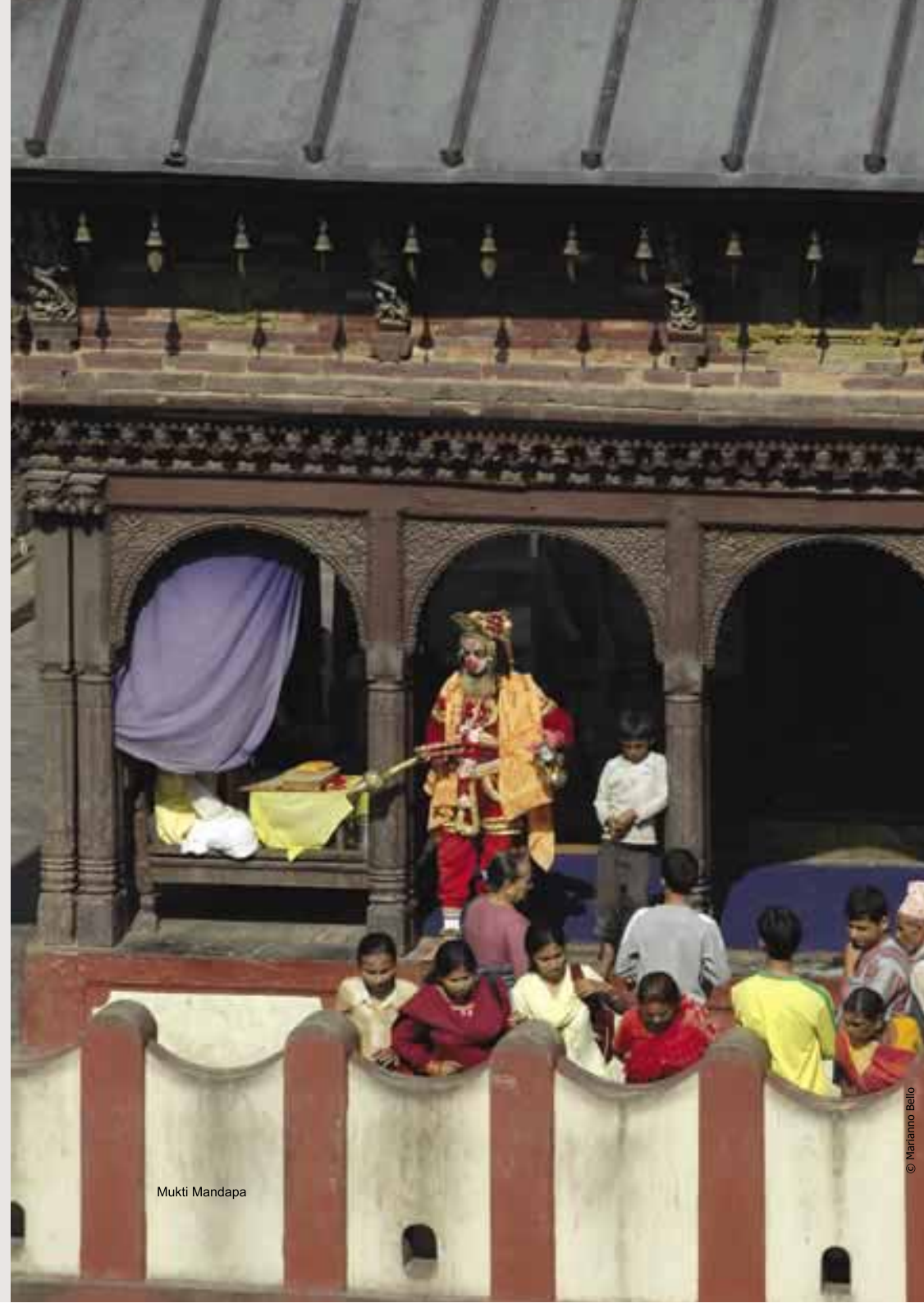
### Bhagvadgita

The **Mahabharata** is an epic poem completed between 300 BC and 500 AD that was originally concerned with a secular tale. With its 100,000 verses it is considered the longest epic poem in the world. The story concerns a never-ending battle between two royal clans, the Pandava and Kaurava families. The numerous versions vary geographically and in the way that they interpret the main events. **Krishna**, one of Hinduism's most popular gods, is introduced through the epic, as an incarnation of Vishnu.

The climax of the poem, is called the **Bhagvadgita**, or celestial song, and is delivered by one of the incarnations of Krishna. In the Bhagvadgita, Krishna explains about the immortality of the soul and that all activity can be considered a sacrifice as long as it is undertaken in a spirit of complete detachment. To most Hindus this sermon is their main religious text.

### Bhajan

Bhajans are devotional hindu songs that have their roots in the hymns found in the Sama Veda, the fourth Veda in the Hindu scriptures (see page 69). They are distinguished by their colloquial subject matter, which is very popular. The songs are usually performed by a group, with one singer leading the others. Anecdotes and episodes from the lives of Gods are conveyed in a simple, soulful manner.





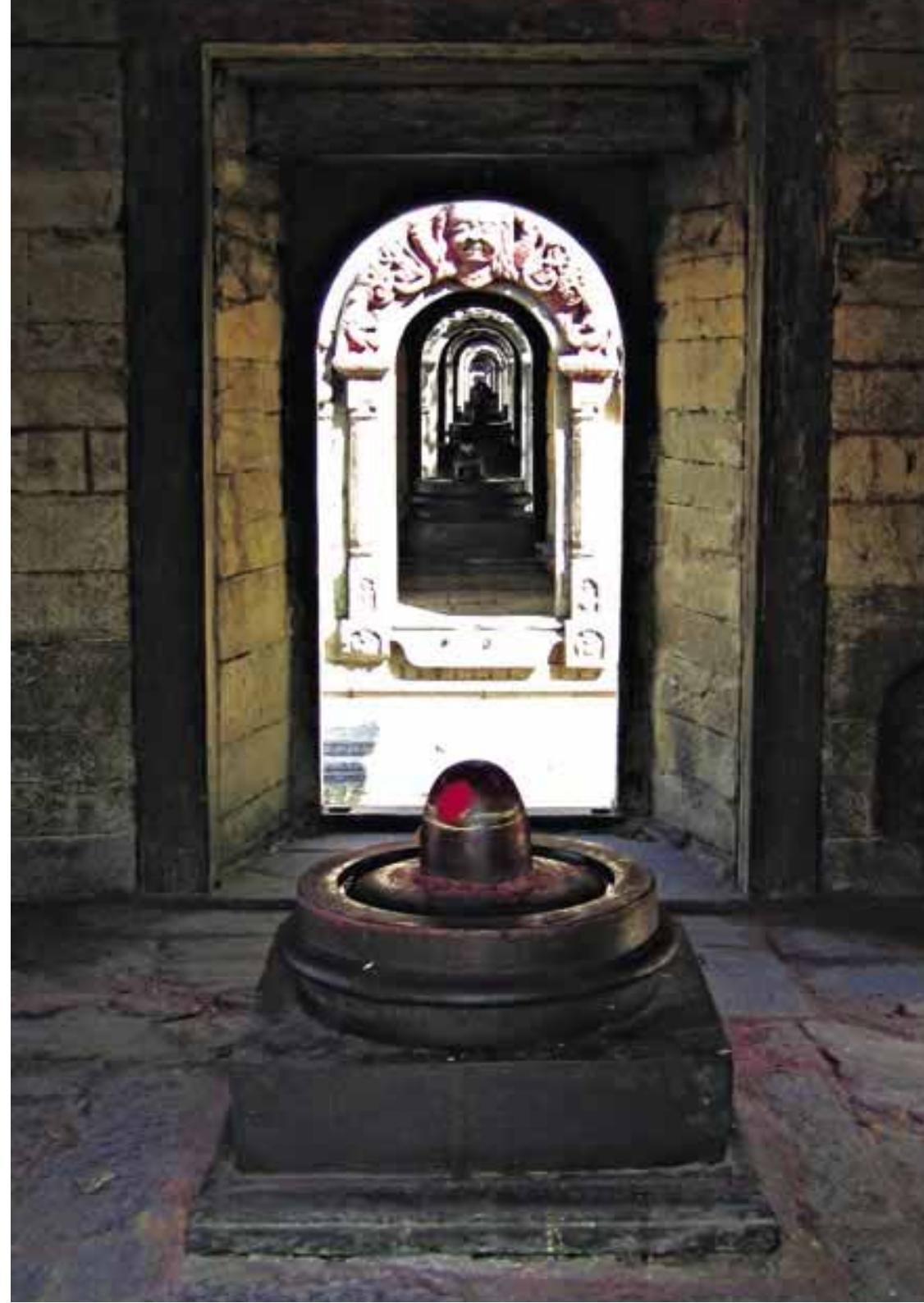


## SHIVA LINGAM

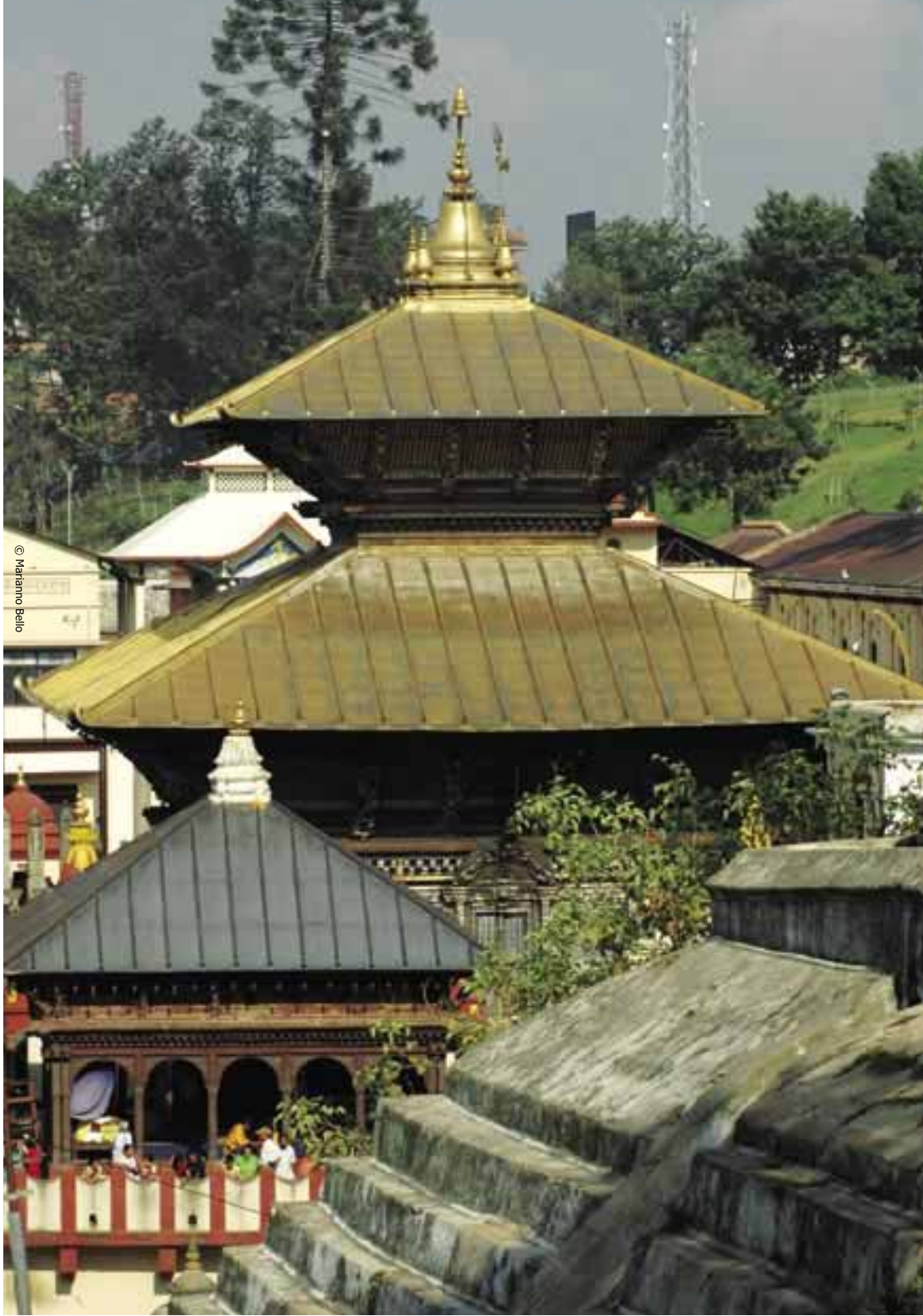
The worship of the Shiva lingam (Linga, lingam or Yoni lingam) as an aniconic form of Shiva is a timeless tradition.

Despite many manifested forms of Shiva, the lingam has remained a prominent Shaivite motif throughout the ages.

Interpretations of how the lingam came to represent Shiva are varied.







Scholars claim that the word lingam derives from two Sanskrit words laya (dissolution) and agaman (re-creation), suggesting that the Shiva lingam symbolizes creation merging at the time of dissolution, out of which the universe reappears at the beginning of the new cycle of creation.

The essence of the Hindu religion is that the soul of each living being is part of the “universal soul”. To be reunited with this universal soul, the individual soul must go through a cycle of rebirths. This implies that there is a cyclical tendency that perpetuates itself to infinity. Such thought is based on the presumption that a balance is maintained in all forms of existence, thereby ensuring the continuity of creation or sristi. Shiva plays a primary role in this process as he is the point where all transformation takes place – from the dissolution of life to the fusion leading to the emergence of new life forms. Shiva has been named ‘God of Destruction’, not in literal terms, but to mark his terminal role in the creation.

Another theory focuses on Shiva as an androgynous image of half man and half woman. This union of Shiva, with his consort Parvati, is similar to the Chinese philosophy of ‘Ying-Yang’ or ‘Male-Female’, an omnipresent duality that exists in nature. The Shiva lingam, presuming it to be the coition of male and female, can be viewed as the climax of this symbolism.

This union of energies leads to the enhanced continuity of the creation. Episodes in the Vedic texts (see page 69) that tell us how a great fire

appeared from the cosmic waters and from this flame the aggrieved Shiva, in the form of a lingam, appeared in his most destructive form. As a penance for his priapism (prolonged erection), he was castrated. The lingam continued in its destruction of creation until it was counteracted by the female energy-form of Parvati. All worldly procreation started after the worship of Yoni-Lingam was restored and all the Gods, including Vishnu and Brahma, accepted the supremacy of Shiva.





It is believed that the lingam contains within itself the three divinities making up the Hindu Trinity: Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva. Brahma abides in the lower part that is hidden in the earth. Vishnu occupies the middle portion of the lingam that is covered by the pedestal or yoni, and finally Shiva is manifested in the top portion above the pedestal.

Over time the shape of the Shiva lingam has become progressively

abstract. The visible portion is usually cylindrical with a domed top.

The pedestal, supposed to be the representation of yoni, usually incorporates a passage for draining away liquid (oil, water, milk, curd or honey) that is poured over the lingam during puja.



Mukhalingam

#### Mukhalingam or Chaturmukha

These lingam have humanoid faces looking towards the four cardinal directions, and one on the apex. The Shiva lingam inside the main temple of Pashupati is a chaturmukha lingam. In different Shaivite temples, different faces are worshipped, At Pashupati it is the north face:

**The East face** is called Tatpurush, the creator, and is also known as Bhava in the Vedas.

**The South face** is Aghor, which is the representation of Yama, the God of Death. It has three eyes, a simple earring in its left ear, and a nagakundala (snake earring) in his right ear.

**The North face** is Vamadeva, known for its kindness and boon giving aspects. The peculiarity of the north face is that the hair is slanted towards the right side forming a crown like structure.

**The West face** is that of Sadojat, (just born) with a child-like face.

**The fifth face**, is called Ishan and is also known as linga sharira. It is the center of all forms of the Lord, and is considered to be the greatest focus of Shakti, or energy. The light from the center of the lingam is believed to spread in all directions.









## CREMATION GHATS

Shiva, the terminal God of Destruction, always has a presence in some form or another at cremating grounds. Located at the foot of the Temple of Pashupati, and along the banks of the Bagmati River, the **Arya Ghat** is believed to be the most sacred funerary ground in the Kathmandu Valley. It is located just north of the footbridge and is the site where members of the royal family and other high caste people are cremated. The ghat is composed of a long strip of paved platforms forming steps to the river. The platforms for royal and distinguished people are located on the top tier.

There are a few shrines in the Arya Ghat and the most important among them are the shrines of **Gangamai and Virupaksha**, situated next to the eastern stairway. The temple of Gangamai was built in 1848. The Virupaksha shrine beside the Gangamai temple houses a statue with tribal features, which shares the same features as the Garuda at Changu Narayan. It is said that the statue of Virupaksha rises an inch or two every year from the water. They say that there was a time when Virupaksha was completely submerged. Today, it stands waist deep in water. Some people believe that Virupaksha unknowingly

Arya Ghat





married his own mother, and in so doing was plunged into an abyss of sin. Virupaksha will only be released from the sins he committed if people continue to share their religious merit with him. That is why visitors to the temple sprinkle offerings of water from the Bagmati. It is also said that there would be large scale destruction in the world if Virupaksha is released completely from his sins.

South of the Arya Ghat, beyond both footbridges over the Bagmati river, are another series of cremation ghats. These are used by the middle and lower castes.

The Pashupati ghats operate 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, because according to the tradition, cremation has to happen as soon as possible after someone has died.

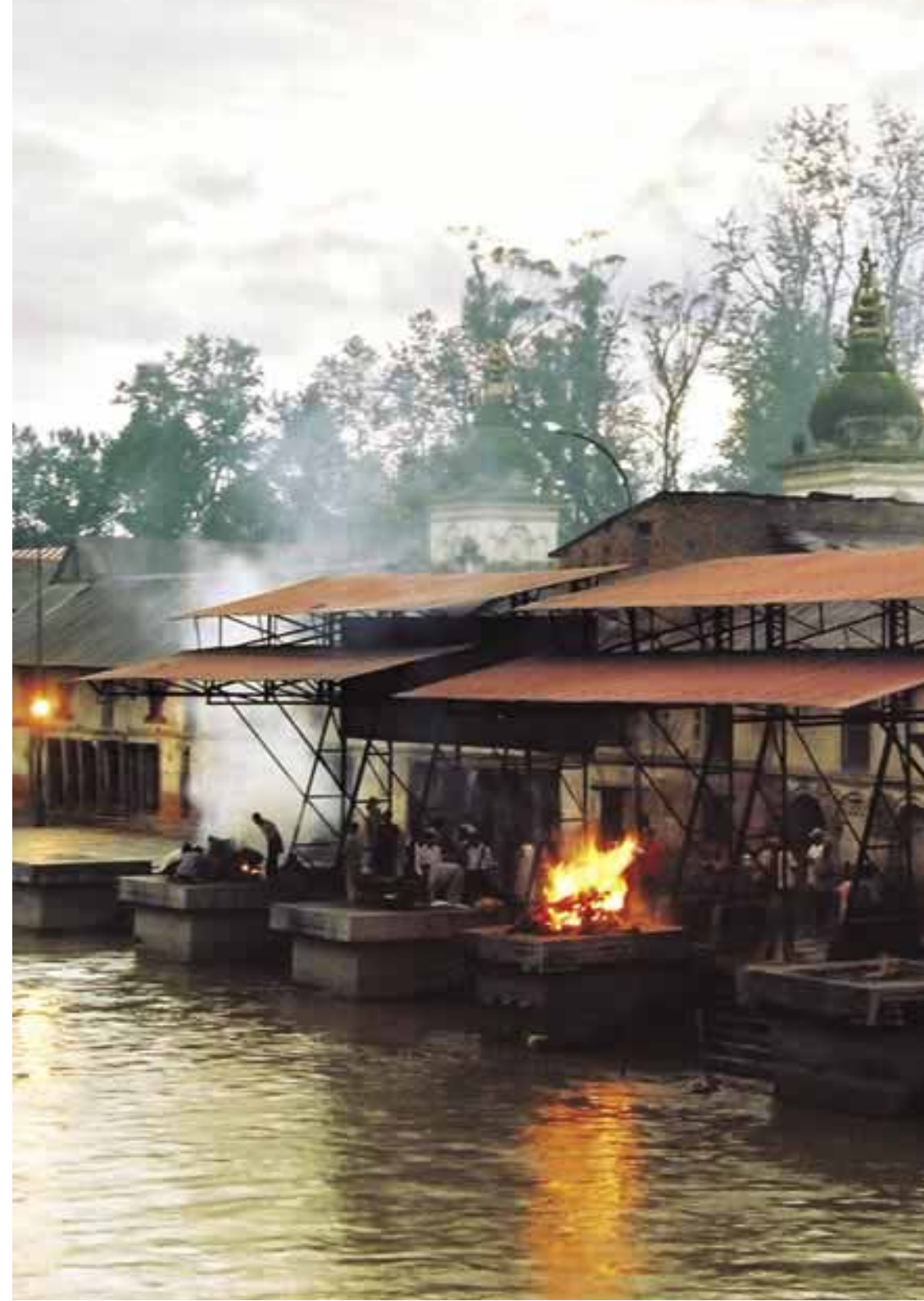
During the cremation ritual the deceased is laid on a stage of firewood that is torched by the closest male relative, normally the eldest son. In Hindu philosophy, it is believed that the human body is formed out of the union of five divine elements: air, water, fire, earth and sky. When a person dies, each of the elements must return to their respective realms to be reunited again in order to generate another life form, thus perpetuating the cycle of life. It is through cremation that these elements are believed to decompose and revert to their realms. The process of cremation relates to the five elements – fire to burn, water to wash away the ashes, air to blow away the smoke and ultimately all matter is absorbed into the earth and the sky.

The dying are brought to the banks of the river so that they can spend their last hours in a holy place, plunge their feet in the divine waters and pray that their released souls reach heaven.

Along the riverbank there are a number of inclined stone platforms, called **ardhajal** (half-water), that are normally submerged in water. These platforms have a special funerary significance. Hindus believe that on the point of death the life energy, pran or hansa, escapes from one of the body parts. To enforce the escape of the life energy from the upper half of the body, which is considered to be a good omen, the dying person is laid on an ardhajal with the lower half of the body immersed in water.

Cremation takes place on the funerary platforms or ghats, located along the riverbank. The body, covered in a katro (yellow cloth), is transported to the ghats on bamboo stretchers. Relatives and caste members follow on foot in a procession, called malami. The malami is usually accompanied by a small musical troop who play a distinct rhythm all the way to the ghat to inform those ahead that somebody has died and the procession is on its way. After the death of a member of the high castes, such as a Brahman, the rhythm is replaced by the periodic blowing of a conch.

Records indicate that 40-50 corpses are burnt daily at Pashupati making the site one of the countries' main cremation areas.











## MOTHER THERESA'S HOME

For a devout Hindu, Pashupati is the preferred location to spend the last days, hours and minutes on this earth. It is a great comfort to know that their soul will be released by the sacred water of the Bagmati River. Consequently, most of the buildings along the west bank of the river are dedicated to the elderly, the dying, the terminally ill and funerary functions.

The **Pancha Dewal**, a large mughal-style building behind the main dharmasala serves as a home for the elderly. Mother Theresa established her **Missionaries of Charity** in a wing of the building where the sisters provide care for the sick.











## KIRIYA PUTRI

The **kiriya putri** buildings where post-cremation rituals are performed were renovated recently. Initially, this mourning place was built considering the plights of mourners who were non-valley residents. The mourners can stay in the rest house throughout the mourning period of 13 days, after which they perform a puja (worship) and return home.

During **kiriya**, the period of mourning, mourners are expected to abide by certain dietary and clothing rules. Male

members shave their heads followed by other purification activities like **homa** (making offerings into a consecrated fire). They discard their clothes and wear white dhoti (white cotton sheet), eat simple salt-free meals, thin ginger slices, and milk. The mourners are permitted to drink **mishri pani** (boiled water with sugar syrup) but food restrictions vary from caste to caste and also differ if you are mourning your father or mother. In case of a mother's death, milk and milk products, except for ghee (butter), are prohibited.

Throughout the period of mourning, close family members should not speak to condolence callers of other castes, and food is prepared strictly by the mourners only. They sleep on straw. In short, they are expected to renounce all worldly pleasures while mourning the dead. Certain items such as food and clothing are donated to good causes in the name of the departed soul. After **kiriya**, it is customary for the closest family members to wear white clothing and accessories for a period of one year.

### Sati

Wives of deceased kings and noblemen, and in some cases even common folk, were expected to commit **sati**, the now banned ritual in which the dead man's widow immolates herself on her husband's funeral pyre. **Sati** was supposed to be voluntary, but it is widely perceived not to have been voluntary in practice. If combined social pressures didn't persuade a woman to immolate herself, many widows were physically forced to their deaths. Royal funerals sometimes have included the deaths of many wives and concubines. Some argue that the **Rig Veda**, which is often recited at funerals, sanctions **sati**. However, there are different interpretations of text. Some say that it does not refer to **sati** as the hymn is about funeral by burial. There are a couple of instances of voluntary self-immolation by women as well as men mentioned in the **Mahabharata**. By about the 10th century **sati** was known across much of the subcontinent and it continued to occur until the early 19th Century. **Sati** still occurs occasionally, mostly in rural areas in India.







## DEOPATAN

To the West of Pashupati one can visit the old Newar settlement of **Deopatan**. The foundation of Deopatan village dates back to the Licchavi times (3rd-8th century). Its streets were laid out in the form of a bow and arrow with the arrow pointing at the main Shiva Shrine.

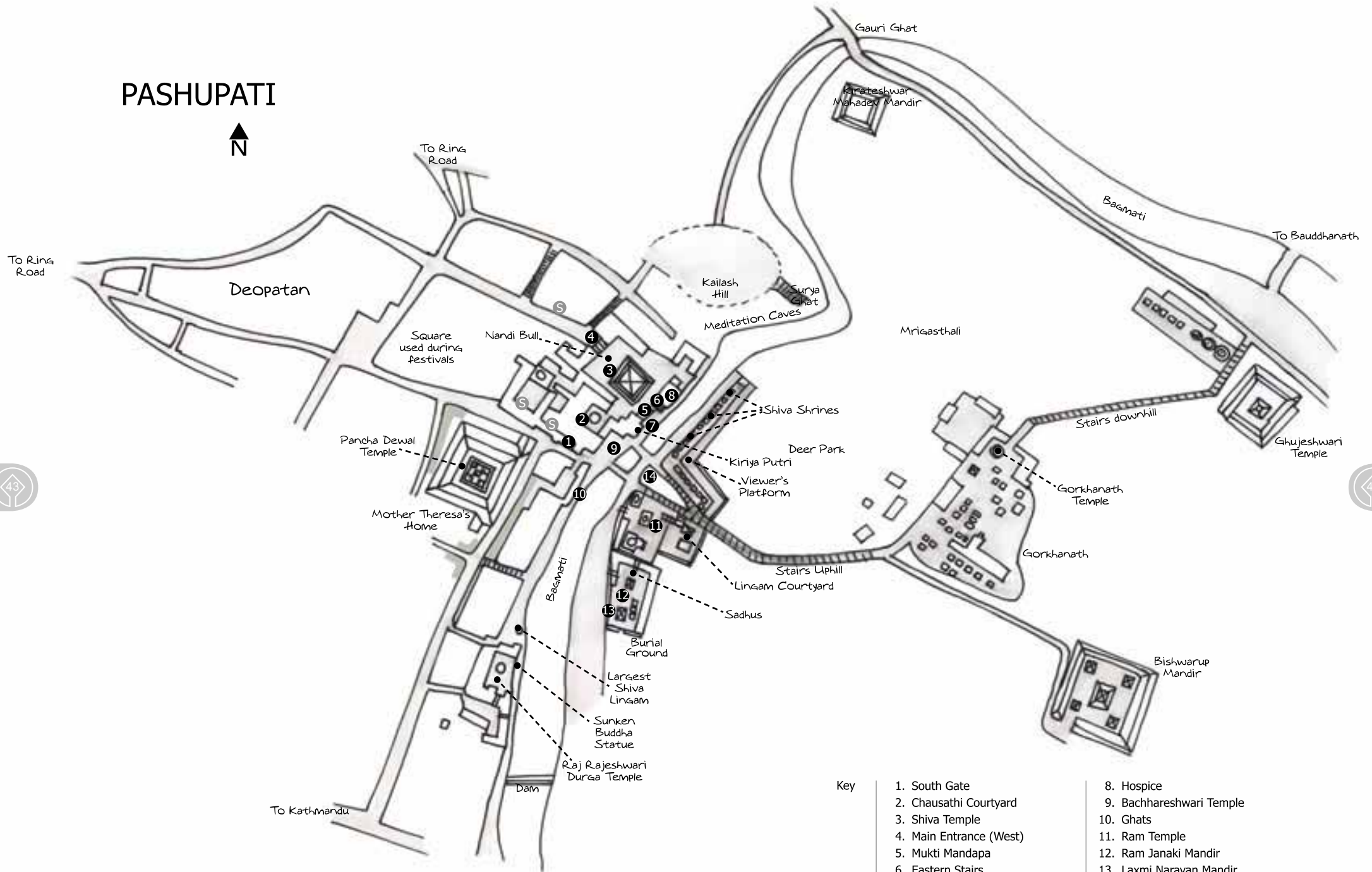
Today, a large part of the old village has disappeared and urban development has seen the remaining section largely being consumed in the sprawl of Kathmandu. There are many shrines scattered throughout Deopatan, the 'city of gods'. Apart from Shaivite shrines, it also houses numerous Vaishnav shrines and some Buddhist statues.

Deopatan is the village where, since Pashupati's earliest history, the priests of Pashupati lived. Today, it is still home of a large local community of priests and others who work at the temple and ensure the continuation of daily rituals and festivals.






# PASHUPATI



## Key

- |                         |                           |
|-------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1. South Gate           | 8. Hospice                |
| 2. Chausathi Courtyard  | 9. Bachhareshwari Temple  |
| 3. Shiva Temple         | 10. Ghats                 |
| 4. Main Entrance (West) | 11. Ram Temple            |
| 5. Mukti Mandapa        | 12. Ram Janaki Mandir     |
| 6. Eastern Stairs       | 13. Laxmi Narayan Mandir  |
| 7. Arya Ghat            | 14. Camphour & Wood store |

 Shoe Storage

 Stands selling puja items



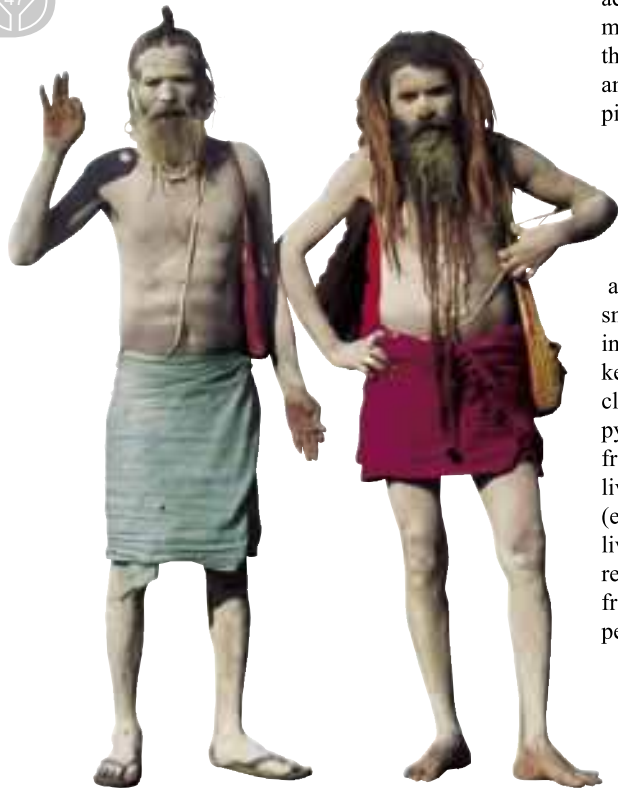




## SADHUS, BABAS AND AGORHI

**S**adhush are typical devotees of Shiva, following his example by practicing asceticism and meditation in the form of yoga. In mythological accounts, we find the tales of the ganas or the troops of Shiva, which accompanied and served him on his major voyages. The sadhus consider themselves as part of the gana of Shiva and are present at every prime Shaivite pilgrimage site.

The signature physical emblems and habitual patterns of Shiva are copied by sadhus to varying degrees – keeping matted hair, applying bibhut (ash) to the body, smoking marijuana and indulging in yogic satsanga are a few of the key practices. Some sadhus wear no clothing all year round, and some keep pythons and snakes as pets. Detached from their families, they live their lives in the ultimate search for moksha (emancipation). Sadhus earn their living by bhiksyatan (begging) or from receiving daksina (offerings of money) from devotees. Some sadhus claim to perform miracles or heal diseases using



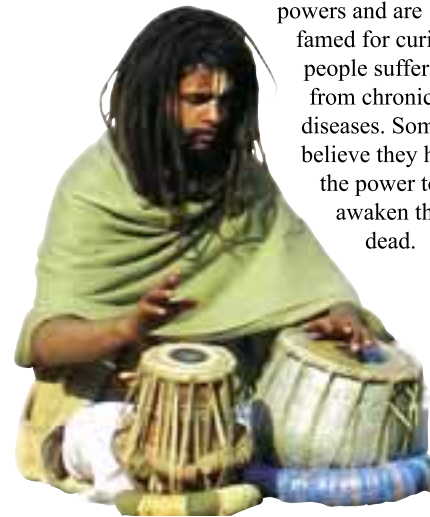




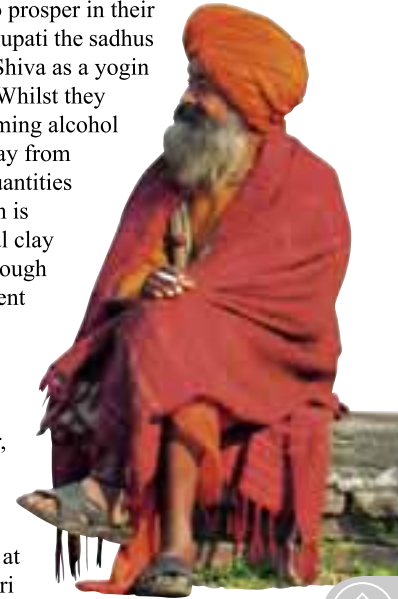
mystical powers. The others present themselves as soothsayers and forecast happenings in people's lives. There are two main groups of sadhus: the general, benign peripatetic sadhus or the followers of the cults of kapalika and aghori, considered tantric practices or 'black magic'.

**Kapalikas** carry skulls in memory of the story of Shiva beheading his father, the incestuous Brahma. Shiva was condemned to carry his father's skull until he found release in Benares. **Aghoris** ('to whom nothing is horrible') are the yogis who eat excrement or human flesh in order to demonstrate their complete indifference to pleasure or pain. Sadhus or Babas who follow the Aghori tradition are indifferent to emotions such as affection, hatred, love, jealousy, greed. Aghoris lead a life which is strikingly opposite to the ideal of Hinduism: they consume alcohol, eat meat, utter obscenities and have uninhibited sex. Although this contravenes most requirements of the Hindu religion Aghoris believe in Hinduism's fundamental reality of moksha or salvation. They are believed

to possess magical powers and are famed for curing people suffering from chronic diseases. Some believe they have the power to awaken the dead.



Pashupati has become a prolific ground for the sadhus, who prosper in their own realm. At Pashupati the sadhus follow the path of Shiva as a yogin or master of yoga. Whilst they refrain from consuming alcohol they do not shy away from consuming large quantities of marijuana, which is smoked in a vertical clay pipe or chillum. Though the sadhus are present all year round it is on the day of **Shivaratri**, which is celebrated as an annual carnival/fair, that a very large number travel from far and wide to congregate at Pashupati. Shivaratri is supposed to mark the end of winter and the advent of spring. The sadhus bid farewell to the winter by lighting dhuni (sacred campfires), and staying out all night (see page 66).



#### Tika

A visit to Pashupati is not complete without being offered a tika by one of the local sadhus. You often encounter them walking by with a small tin can containing the tika mix.

Tika is a symbol of blessing from the gods and is worn by both men and women on the forehead, (not to be mistaken for the red dot or bindi which married women wear in between the eyes.) The tika varies from a small dot made from red tika powder to a fully fledged mixture of yoghurt, rice and tika powder.



## BURIAL GROUNDS

On the opposite bank of the Bagmati River are the Ram temple complexes, where most of the Sadhus live.

Behind these complexes is a small graveyard. According to the Hindu custom, a number of people cannot be cremated: priests, sadhus, very young children and people who died of poisoning. All of them are buried close to the Bagmati River.

### Bankali

Behind the Mrighastali deer park and towards the Gujeshwari complex, is a small wood called Bankali. Over the last few decades, this site has turned into the official graveyard for a number of Nepali ethnic groups. The Kirants, Rais and Limbus vehemently denounce any form of Hindu religious practice and therefore prefer to be buried rather than cremated. Kirants, who have always claimed to be the descendents of Shiva, were officially permitted to bury their dead in this jungle, close to their revered deity.







Steps leading to Mrigasthali



# MRIGASTHALI

Crossing the footbridge to the eastern bank of the Bagmati River and climbing the hill one enters the woods, where Shiva once lived in the form of a deer. They are known as **Mrigasthali** and are dotted with numerous votive lingams including the **Pandra Shivalaya** or the fifteen abodes of Shiva. These lingams were erected between 1859 and 1869. The road climbing the Mrigasthali hill leads all the way past the Gorkhanath Mandir to Ghujeshwari Temple. The shikhara style **Gorkhanath Mandir** (recognizable from the tapering towers) was restored in 2001 and is surrounded with a proliferation of lingam, and other Shaivite Iconography.

The **Ghujeshwari Temple** is located north east, down the hill and on the banks of the river. Legends recount that when Shiva discovered that his wife Sati had burnt herself alive after being insulted, he raged with grief and



Ghujeshwari Temple



© Mariano Bello

scattered her charred body parts in 51 sacred places. It is said that Sati's vagina landed at Ghujeshwari, thus it represents the female counterpart to the potent masculine symbolism at Pashupati. A second myth relates the site to the Buddhist creation myth of the Kathmandu Valley. It is said that the divine lotus, that bloomed at Swayambhu as the divine flame, first took root below the Great Lake in the spot that is now occupied by the Ghujeshwari temple.

Between the two temples, there is a small niche in the wall. People walk with their eyes closed, palms stuck together aiming at the niche from the other side of the road. If a person succeeds in sticking his hands into this niche the very first time, it is believed that he has not committed a single sin in his lifetime. Sadly, almost everyone fails the first time!





Meditation caves at  
Surya Ghat

## GAURI GHAT AND KAILASH HILL

From the Ghujeshwari temple a lane follows the river downstream, turning back to the main Pashupati complex.

This road passed the **Kirateshwar Mahadev Mandir**, on the right, which hosts Nepali classical music concerts on full-moon evenings. A little further downstream, at the opposite bank, is the **Gauri Ghat**, where the Bagmati enters the Pashupati ravine. Here the road crosses the river and circles back to Pashupati.

Just across the bridge a smaller path provides a short-cut taking you to the **Kailash Hill**. The little hill is named after the Tibetan sacred mountain which Shiva chose as a meditation spot. From the hill you have good view of the Pashupati temple complex. At the eastern edge of the Kailash, a steep staircase leads down to the **Surya Ghat**, the site of several caves hewn out of the cliffs. These caves have been used for meditation for centuries, and are sometimes still occupied by Sadhus.





Mrighastali





## FESTIVALS

by Shanti Mishra

Nepal is known to foreigners as a land of fascinating festivals, and rightly so as the Nepalese celebrate more festivals than there are days in a year. They are celebrated according to the lunar calendar and therefore do not occur on the same date from year to year and every full moon day (the 15th day of the lunar month) has special significance. The lifestyle of the Nepali people is uniquely interwoven with religious culture and rituals and entertainment is provided by the numerous festivals. They are not merely spectacles but a celebration of the glorious cultural heritage. Festivals unite people of diverse cultural backgrounds and faiths into one nation. Besides Gods and Goddesses, the worshipping during some festivals is in honour of the earth, sun, moon, parents, brothers, cows, snakes, dogs, rivers, plants, tools, weapons - practically everything!



Some festivals such as Dasain and Tihar are celebrated throughout the country. Some are celebrated only in the cities. These include Indra Jatra in Kathmandu, Rato Machhendranath Jatra in Patan and Bisket Jatra in Bhaktapur. Some are celebrated only in one village; Hari Shankar Jatra in Pharping, Adinath Jatra in Chobhar and Maha-Laxmi Jatra in Thankot. The main festivals which occur at Pashupati are:

Name	Month of Celebration
Akchhaya Tritiya	Baisakh (Apr/May)
Trishul Jatra	Asar (Jun/Jul)
Teej	Bhadra (Aug/Sep)
Balachaturdeshi	Mangsir (Nov/Dec)
Shivaratri	Falgun (Feb/Mar)
Ramnavami	Chaitra (Mar/Apr)

#### Akchhaya Tritiya

(Baisakh/April-May)

Akchhaya Tritiya is celebrated to honour the wedding of Shiva and Parvati. It occurs on the third day of the waxing moon in the month of Baisakh. In Kathmandu devotees go to the Pashupati temple to offer puja to Shiva. Pious people believe that if they give a donation to the needy and the Brahmins on this auspicious day,

they will receive blessings from Shiva. A special drink made out of Sakkhar (white molasses) and cardamom is served to the visitors.

#### Trishul Jatra

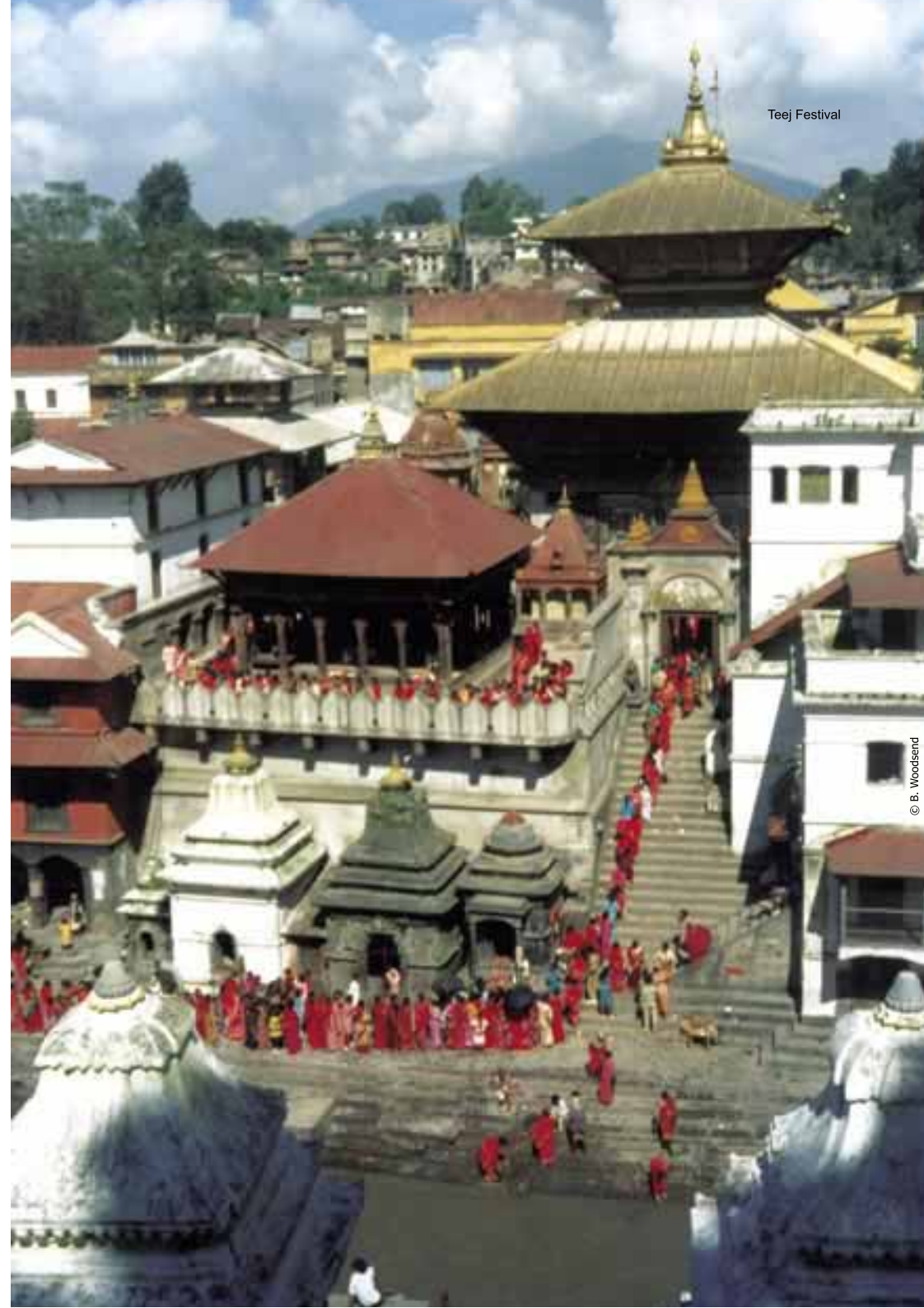
(Asar/June-July)

Trishul Jatra is observed by the people of the Deopatan village on Bhalabhala Astami (7 days before the waning moon) in the month of Asar. In Newari, the festival is called “Machatiyajatra”. It was initiated by King Narendra Dev to glorify Bandhus Datta, a great Tantric personality. He has extraordinary powers to drive away all kinds of evil spirits, and a tendency to steal children. On this occasion, a procession accompanies three wooden chariots transporting five children through the streets. The children lie flat atop an upright trident (the emblem of Shiva) as if they have been impaled. This procession is accompanied by traditional music and passes through Deopatan.

#### Teej

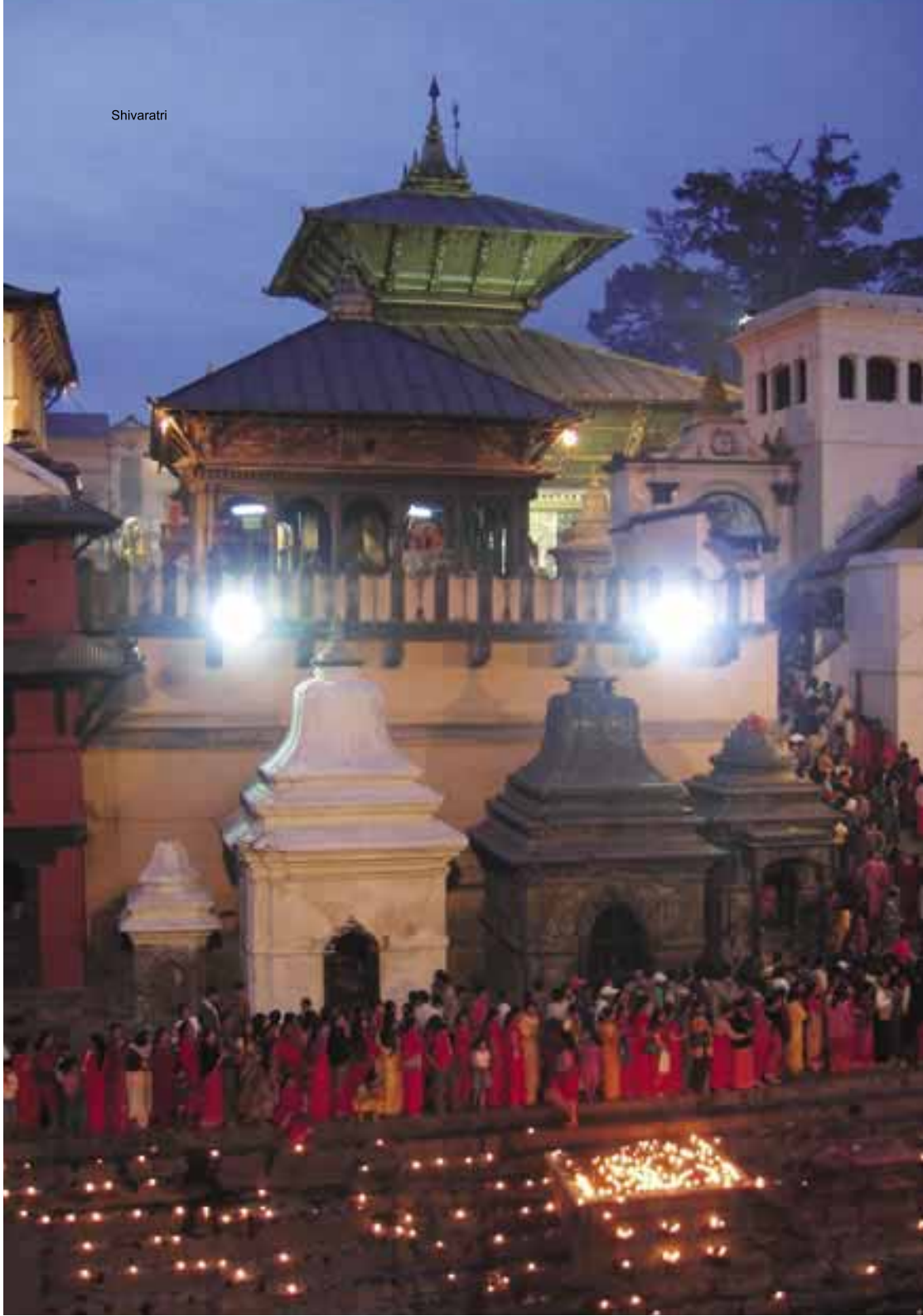
(Bhadra/August-September)

Teej is celebrated by women who pray for the happiness and longevity of their husbands. On the first day in the evening, the women eat a variety of delicious food prepared by themselves and also sent from their maitis (parental homes). The food sent by their maiti is called ‘dar’ and the day is known as ‘dar khane din’. The second and third days are observed by fasting without drinking even a drop of water and by ritual bathing in the Bagmati River to wash away any sins that may have been committed throughout the year. On the second day, the day of Teej, thousands of women visit the



Teej Festival





Pashupati temple, offer puja by singing or dancing and stay awake the whole night, which is known as 'Jagram'. On Panchami day, they visit the Risheswar temple at Teku, Kathmandu. It is worth visiting the colourful mela (fair) that is held at Teku and Pashupati. Hundreds of women come from villages, hills and cities dressed in red saris and blouses and decorated with red bangles on their wrists and different colourful tikas on their foreheads.

### Balachaturdeshi

(Mangsir/November-December)

The Nepalese observe interesting and curious rituals in the year following the death of a close relative. Balachaturdeshi is one such ritual. It is celebrated in memory of the dead on the 14th day of the waning moon in the month of Mangsir. Relatives walk around the Pashupati area offering Satvij (a mixture of seven seeds) to all gods and goddesses en route through the beautiful Mrigasthali forest in the name of deceased. Relatives pray for exemption from the cycle of millions of births and rebirths. It takes about three hours to complete the journey. Hundreds of family groups from far and wide gather around Pashupati at dusk on the previous day which enables them to start the ritual early in the morning, after taking a holy bath. After hours of walking, they return to where they started and select a quiet place to take prasad (sacrament).

### Shivaratri

(Falgun/February-March)

Shivaratri is celebrated by devotees of Shiva. On Shivaratri followers of Shiva fast for a whole day and night and observe Jagram. A very colourful mela is held at the Pashupati Temple, where pilgrims from all over Nepal and India congregate. Foreigners can watch the religious activities, thousands of devotees queuing, orange robed sadhus, naked ascetics, and fires burning along the banks of the Bagmati River throughout the night.

### Ramawami

(Chaitra/March-April)

Ramawami festival falls on the 9th of Chaitra Purnima (full moon). It is celebrated to commemorate the birth of Ram. He is worshipped as the incarnation of Vishnu, and also as the ideal King and hero of the great epic Ramayana. Ram's wife, Sita, born in Janakpur, is equally worshipped as a goddess and ideal exemplary queen. There are many temples dedicated to Sita and Ram in Kathmandu valley. One of the most famous contains a large statue of Ram and is located behind the Pashupati temple on the eastern bank of Bagmati River. A large number of devotees visit this temple on this auspicious day.





# HINDUISM

Hinduism does not have a single founder, a specific theological system or a central religious organisation. It consists of multiple different religious groups and practices that have evolved over the last five millenia. As such, it is a complex religion to define, and can best be summed up as a way of life based on teachings of ancient sages and scriptures like the Vedas and the Upanishads.

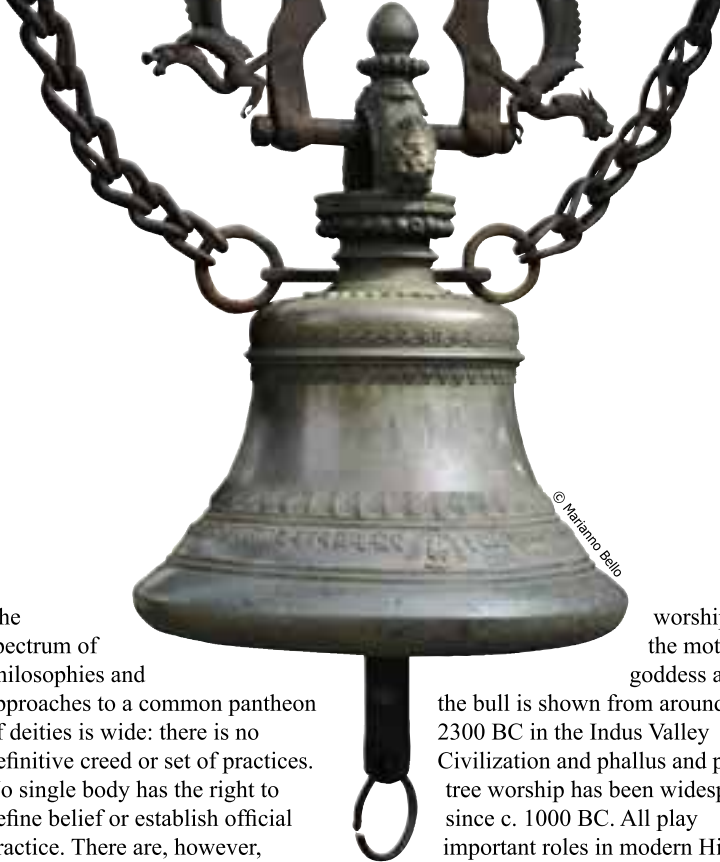




The spectrum of philosophies and approaches to a common pantheon of deities is wide: there is no definitive creed or set of practices. No single body has the right to define belief or establish official practice. There are, however, spiritual leaders and philosophers who are widely revered and there is a large cannon of sacred literature. For the outsider the number of gods and manifestations can be baffling, but Hinduism is essentially monotheistic with the multiple deities personifying attributes of a single, supreme God. In essence the diverse approaches to Hinduism are tied together by the belief that everything is connected.

### Origins

Unlike Christianity or Judaism and Islam, Hinduism does not date from a specific historical event. Its earliest origins probably began in animism, or the belief that natural phenomena and objects have souls, and in totemism or veneration of objects and symbols. The



worship of the mother goddess and the bull is shown from around 2300 BC in the Indus Valley Civilization and phallus and peepul tree worship has been widespread since c. 1000 BC. All play important roles in modern Hindu worship.

### Vedas

The Vedic Age (1200-800 BC) was a period of growth and change, and produced the Sanskrit texts that provide many of the Hindu religious ideals. The four Vedas are **Rig, Yajur, Sama** and **Atharva**. They are believed to have divine origins and were passed down orally. They consist mainly of hymns which were chanted during rituals and are concerned more with practice than devotion. The **Rig Veda** is the first and most important of the four, probably dating from 1500 BC and attaining its final form around 900 BC. It consists of over 1,000 sacrificial hymns, chants and legends and the earliest reference to **Vishnu**, although he is a minor deity

here, **Indra** as the god of rain, Rudra, who later becomes **Shiva** and **Agni**, the god of fire. The **Pursha Shukta** tells the tale of the primeval man who survived his sacrifice and created the four social classes, the first reference to a caste system. The process of sacrifice gained in popularity from c.900 BC and was believed to recreate the original sacrifice in the Pursha Shukta.

**Brahmans** place particular emphasis on procedures, elaborate ritual, sacrifice and caste. They date from 600 BC. The **Upanishads** place more emphasis on the unity of the individual soul with the Universal Soul. The Upanishads propagated the use of the word Om, which represents supreme consciousness. The **Mahapuranas** are 18 writings that contain interpretations of the creation of the universe, its history, destruction and recreation, the lineage of gods and divine legends. They are a great source of mythological chronology and contain references to regional architectural and artistic developments.

## Hindu Practice

### Darshana

Darshana describes the 'vision' of the deity that worshippers hope to gain when they visit a temple or a shrine. It also refers to religious insight gained through prayer.

### 4 Human Goals

Artha is the pursuit of material gains through legal means, kama the satisfaction of desires, dharma performing ones duty according to position, moksha the ultimate goal of attaining liberation from the cycle of rebirth.

### Dharma

The Mahabharata defines 10 embodiments of dharma that represent the order inherent in human life, maintained by ones duty. One's duties depend on age, position and caste. Respect for elders is considered important and many consider marriage as a son's religious duty. This requires three levels of order; one at a spiritual level with the universe, a second that requires order in society and revolves around the caste system and a third which requires order of the individual by obedience to a moral code.

### Karma

The effect of former actions, which is central to achieving liberation from the cycle of life.

### Ahimsa

The doctrine of non-violence.

### Rebirth

The never-ending cycle of rebirth and the transmigration of souls.

### Cremation

In Hindu philosophy, it is believed that the human body is formed out of the union of five divine elements: air, water, fire, earth and sky. After death each of the elements have to return to their respective realms to be reunited again to generate another life form, thus perpetuating the cycle of life. It is by cremating by burning that these elements are able to revert to their realms.



## Mahabharata and Ramayana

The Mahabharata and the Ramayana are the two main historic epics in Indian culture. Although initially meant as secular texts, both introduce a number of deities.

The **Mahabharata** is an epic poem completed between 300 BC and 500 AD. The main characters are the warring families Pandava and Kaurava. **Krishna**, one of Hinduism's most popular gods, is introduced through the epic, as an incarnation of Vishnu. He is surrounded by the attentions of the gopis or cow-girls and had 16,108 wives. The **Bhagvadgita** is considered the apogee of the poem and is considered the primary religious text by many Hindus. It takes the form of Krishna's address to one of the Pandava brothers, as they waited for the great battle of the Mahabharata to commence. It addresses the need to do one's duty, within the confines of the caste restrictions and with devotion to a supreme and personal God.

The **Ramayana** was completed between c.350 BC and 250 AD, and also relates originally secular events. The central figure is **Ram**, the ideal King and lover. The best loved of the 7 books are the last three that tell the story of the help Ram receives from his friend **Hanuman**, the monkey king, and the battle with Ravana after Sita (Ram's wife) is kidnapped.

From about 500 AD, Hinduism began to crystallize into two main sects devoted to Shiva (**Shaivites**) and to

Vishnu (**Vishnuvites**), with numerous sub-divisions within both.

## Puja

Puja is the act of worship. Most Hindu homes have a room or a corner dedicated to one of the gods, and families visit specific temples on different occasions. The act of performing puja often focuses on a particular desire for something: good health, good exam results or the birth of a son. An offering is made to God, and the vision of god or darshana. Puja is usually performed on an individual basis, but occasionally groups gather to sing or pray together. Krishna mentions puja in the Bhagvadgita. After the Vedic age when ritual was only performed by Brahmins, Hinduism became a more 'democratic' faith. Divine images were created in stone, wood and metal and sanctified, giving the common people access to the Godhead.

## The Hindu Caste System

The Rig Veda describes how the original caste was divided into 4 distinct layers: the **Brahmans** who represent the unpolluted and come from Brahma's mouth; the **Kshatriyas** or warrior class who come from Brahma's arms; the **Vaishays** or mercantile and professional class

coming from Brahma's thighs and finally the **Shudras** or working class, coming from Brahma's feet. Those considered to fall outside these groups are known as the untouchables, as contact with such a person was considered polluting to the soul. They were restricted to the professions that dealt with the dead and excrement. In addition there are many thousands of sub-castes, with 1,800 sub-divisions of the Brahmin caste alone.

There are strict requirements regarding the interaction

between castes, prohibiting inter-marriage and the eating of food that has been prepared by a member of a lower caste.

The **Newari caste system** in the Kathmandu Valley traditionally grouped people by occupation. Newar castes range from priest or astrologer caste representing the top of the spectrum to the lowest castes such as tailors, and nail cutters. The untouchables, or dalits, fall outside the spectrum and the term essentially connotes oppressed people. However, there are numerous ethnic subdivisions amongst those termed dalit and they do not represent a homogenous group.

The current system in Nepal is attributed to the reign of King Sthiti Malla (1382-95), and was codified in the 1854 Muluki Ain (Law Code). A highly stratified document, it dictated the professions each caste could perform and imposed numerous social restrictions. Legally the code has not been relevant since the 1967 Constitution, yet it still has many social implications in present day Nepal. The old order is particularly influential within the Newari communities of Patan, Kathmandu and Bhaktapur.





## The Main Hindu Deities

### Brahma

The Creator, one of the central Hindu Trinity along with Vishnu and Shiva. In early vedic writing Brahma is the power of the universal principle that governed the universe. Worship of Brahma was at its height in the 4th- 5th centuries AD, and by the 6th century AD it was effectively overtaken by Vishnu and Shiva worship. This accounts for the lack of temples dedicated to the god, as the main period of temple building was yet to start. Brahma carries the Veda book, a water vessel and the beads of time. **Saraswati** is the consort of Brahma, and is worshipped as the goddess of learning and education in her own right. Saraswati is usually white in colour and is depicted riding a swan.

### Vishnu

The Preserver, with 10 incarnations. Vishnu took these forms to save the world from disaster.

**Ram** and **Krishna** are the most influential of the incarnations of Vishnu, both of whom are human in form. The incarnations are: the Fish, Tortoise, Boar, Half-man half-lion, Dwarf, Ram with an Axe, Ram, Krishna, Buddha and Mounted on a horse Kalki.

The final incarnation, will accompany the final destruction of this present age. Vishnu's consort is **Laxmi**, goddess of wealth and light, who is worshipped during the Tihar festival. His vehicle is **Garuda**, the winged man-bird figure and arch enemy of the Nagas (snakes).

### Shiva

The Destroyer, the power through whom the universe evolves. He is considered more remote than Vishnu, but is a popular subject for stone carvings and metal work and is always accompanied by his vehicle the Nandi (Bull).

His manifestation as the **Nataraja**, the 14 armed Lord of the Dance, shows him dancing in a ring of cosmic fire but **Pashupati**, the Lord of Beasts is probably Shiva's most popular manifestation in Nepal. The **Lingam**, a phallic symbol of energy and fertility is the most common representation of Shiva. **Parvati** is Shiva's wife and their sons are the elephant headed **Ganesh**, and the 6 headed **Kartikkeya**.

### Ganesh

Certainly one of the most popular gods who frequently appears at gateways and on door frames as the great clearer of obstacles. Any new venture begins with prayers to the rotund deity, and the Kings of Nepal visit his shrine soon after their coronation. Ganesh owes his elephant head to his violent father, Shiva, who decapitated



him after failing to believe the son was his own. As he repented Shiva promised to replace the severed skull with that of the first animal to pass by- in this case, an elephant. His vehicle is a rat or a shrew.

### Shakti or Durga

Worship of the female goddess developed largely out of **Tantrism**, which in many cases contradicts the general themes of Hindusim. Sacrifice, ritual sexual intercourse and other taboo rites were followed and the worship of **Kali**, the destructive blue goddess who wears a necklace of skulls, emerged from this cult. **Parvati** is a benign form of Shakti. As **Bhairavi**, consort of Bhairav and thus Shiva, she is the goddess of war and as **Taleju** she was the tutelary deity of the Malla Kings and resides in the Kumari. Nepal's most celebrated festival, Dashain, sees many animal sacrifice in the name of placating Durga.

### Bhairav

Bhairav is Shiva's most terrifying form. He is bent on death and destruction- his name translates as terror. Bhairav can be black or blue and is always angry. When he is in his most terrible white form, he must be hidden from view and is only visible during Indra Jatra in the Kathmandu Durbar Square. He represents the forces of evil and must be placated.



### Indra

God of the Heavens and of Rain. He is linked to the natural elements and is worshipped to provide good harvests. The festival of Indra Jatra in the Kathmandu Durbar Square involves raising a ceremonial pole to placate the god.

### Nagas

Nagas (snakes) play a prominent role in Nepali mythology. They provide rain and have been traditionally associated with avoiding drought- when snakes leave the valley it is a biological indicator that the water table has been lowered. Representations of Nagas carved in stone, wood and cast in metal can be seen all over the Kathmandu Valley.

Shiva Parvati









For more information please contact:  
UNESCO Kathmandu  
P.O. Box 14391, Jawalakhel, Lalitpur  
Kathmandu, Nepal

Email: [kathmandu@unesco.org](mailto:kathmandu@unesco.org)

Tel: +977-1-5554-396/769

Fax: +977-1-5554-450

[www.unesco.org/kathmandu](http://www.unesco.org/kathmandu)



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